

Message Text

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S E C R E T STATE 130912

NODIS
WHITE HOUSE FOR BRZEZINSKI

FOLLOWING REPEAT TEL AVIV 4042 ACTION SECSTATE JUNE 7

QUOTE S E C R E T TEL AVIV 4042

NODIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR, IS
SUBJECT: GENERAL GUR'S WORRIES ABOUT WAR FEVER

SUMMARY: IN A MEETING WHICH SENATOR STONE AND I HAD WITH
GENERAL GUR ON JUNE 3, THE CHIEF OF STAFF SAID HE
THOUGHT THE SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST WAS CHARACTER-
IZED BY AN ATMOSPHERE OF INCREASING MISUNDERSTANDING,
SUSPICION AND TENSION. THIS WORRIED HIM GREATLY. HE
ATTRIBUTED THE ROOT CAUSE OF THIS ATMOSPHERE TO PRESI-
DENT CARTER'S STATEMENTS, BUT HE WAS WILLING TO ACCEPT
THAT THE LIKUD VICTORY AND THE POSITIONS WHICH BEGIN
HAD TAKEN ARE ADDING TO THE TENSION. THE GENERAL SAID
HE FAVORED THE STEP-BY-STEP NEGOTIATING PROCESS BECAUSE

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HE THOUGHT THE SEARCH FOR AN OVERALL SOLUTION REDUCED
THE AVAILABLE OPTIONS AND FUELED THE TALK OF WAR, AND
HE ESPECIALLY DEPLORED PUBLIC TALK ABOUT URGENT TIME-
TABLES FOR CONVENING GENEVA. END SUMMARY.

1. GENERAL GUR'S VERY CALM BUT SOMBER COMMENTS MADE A
DEEP IMPRESSION ON BOTH SENATOR STONE AND ME. THE
GENERAL'S DESCRIPTION OF A "BAD ATMOSPHERE" IN THE
MIDDLE EAST TODAY WAS BASED, HE ADMITTED, ON HIS FEELINGS
MORE THAN ON ANY SPECIFIC FACTORS ALTHOUGH HE DID

ENUMERATE SEVERAL. THE PRINCIPAL REASONS, HE MAINTAINED, FOR THE CURRENT UNEASE, SUSPICION AND MISUNDERSTANDING ARE STATEMENTS MADE BY PRESIDENT CARTER AND THEIR ASSOCIATED "CLARIFICATIONS," BEGINNING WITH THE FIRST REFERENCE AT CLINTON TO A PALESTINIAN "HOMELAND." "NOBODY KNOWS WHAT TO BELIEVE," GUR LAMENTED. ALTHOUGH THE LIKUD'S ELECTION VICTORY AND BEGIN'S SUBSEQUENT STATEMENTS HAD ADDED TO THE SUSPICION AND CONCERN, THE GENERAL INSISTED THAT THE CURRENT BAD ATMOSPHERE WAS "AN ARTIFICIAL CHANGE THAT DID NOT START IN THE MIDDLE EAST."

2. GUR SEES THE MIDDLE EAST AS A VERY COMPLEX PROBLEM. THERE COULD BE NO PERMANENT "ONCE AND FOR ALL" SOLUTION. FOR THAT REASON, HE SAID THAT HE WAS AN ADVOCATE OF THE STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS OF NEGOTIATION. THAT PROCESS PROVIDED EVERYONE WITH OPTIONS, ALLOWING THE VARIOUS LEADERS TO PLAY TOUGH OR SOFT ACCORDING TO THE REALITIES AND THE NEED TO SATISFY THEIR OWN PEOPLES. THE STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH REQUIRES A DEFINED POLITICAL PROCESS AND A BASIC CALMNESS; IT WAS THIS PROCESS AND THIS CALMNESS WHICH HAD BROUGHT ABOUT THE SINAI II AGREEMENT BY WHICH ISRAEL HAD BEEN INDUCED TO GIVE UP STRATEGIC TERRAIN AND TO TAKE THE CHANCE (OR ACCEPT THE RISK) OF BETTER RELATIONS.

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3. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE IDEA OF AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT, WITH DEADLINES AND TIMETABLES, IS JUST NOT WORKABLE, AND DANGEROUS. HE ESPECIALLY DEPLORED SETTING A PUBLIC DEADLINE FOR CONVENING GENEVA, AND TALKING ABOUT IT AS IF IT WERE "NOW OR NEVER." WHEN THIS CONCEPT IS INTRODUCED, OPTIONS ARE CLOSED, PEOPLE BEGIN TO TALK ABOUT WAR, AND THERE IS INCREASED MISUNDERSTANDING, SUSPICION, AND TENSION. THE GENERAL DID NOT BELIEVE THAT ANY MIDDLE EASTERN COUNTRY WANTED WAR IN 1977: "HOWEVER, RUMORS, TALK, AND COMMENT ABOUT WAR START A CHAIN OF EVENTS THAT CAN INEVITABLY LEAD TO WAR." AND HE SAID THAT HE WAS HEARING TOO MUCH OF THIS KIND OF TALK, ON BOTH SIDES OF THE BORDERS.

4. GENERAL GUR WAS MORE SPECIFIC IN DISCUSSING EGYPT. HE SAID THAT COUNTRY HAD BEGUN TO IMPROVE ITS MILITARY READINESS IN FEBRUARY, AND ITS ACTIVITIES IN MAY HAD REFLECTED A THREE-FOLD INCREASE OVER THOSE OF MAY IN PREVIOUS YEARS. WITHIN THE LAST TWO MONTHS, FOR EXAMPLE, EGYPT HAD CONDUCTED TWO EXERCISES IN WHICH IT BROUGHT MORE VEHICLES AND MEN ACROSS THE SUEZ CANAL THAN PERMITTED BY THE SINAI II AGREEMENT; WHAT IS MORE PUZZLING, IT DID NOT EVEN TRY TO CONCEAL THAT FACT. FURTHERMORE, HE SAID, THERE HAD BEEN RECENT VIOLATIONS

DISCOVERED BY UNEF OBSERVERS, SUCH AS EXCESS NUMBERS OF BATTALIONS AND MEN AND THE PRESENCE OF SAM-7'S IN THE LIMITED FORCES AREA. IN THE PAST EGYPT HAD VIOLATED THE TERMS OF SINAI II AGREEMENT IN WAYS THE GENERAL COULD UNDERSTAND AND EXPLAIN AS A PROFESSIONAL MILITARY MAN (WHILE NOT APPROVING OF THEM), BUT THESE CURRENT ACTIONS HE COULD NOT UNDERSTAND. HE COULD SEE NO MILITARY LOGIC IN THEM.

5. CARRYING HIS POINT FURTHER, GENERAL GUR SAID THAT THAT VERY DAY HE WAS ASSESSING THE SITUATION IN BOTH THE NORTH AND THE SOUTH BECAUSE OF THE CURRENT STATE OF SECRET

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TENSION AND SUSPICION. YET HE WAS CONSTRAINED FROM MAKING ANY CHANGES IN THE DISPOSITION OF FORCES BECAUSE THE MOVES MIGHT BE MISINTERPRETED - AND ADD TO THE TENSIONS.

6. CONCLUDING ON A MORE SPECULATIVE NOTE, GENERAL GUR SAID THAT THE ARABS MIGHT CONSIDER THAT WITH ISRAEL NOW BETWEEN GOVERNMENTS THIS WOULD BE A GOOD TIME FOR A SURPRISE ATTACK. NOT THAT HE BELIEVED THERE IS DANGER OF ANOTHER 1973-TYPE ATTACK. RATHER, HE SPECULATED, THE ARABS MIGHT TRY A LIMITED SURPRISE ATTACK ON, SAY, THE ISRAELI OBSERVATION POST ON MT. HERMON OR AGAINST THE OIL AREA (ON THE ISRAELI-CLAIMED SIDE) OF THE GULF OF SUEZ. SUCH A MOVE COULD BE INTENDED TO PROVOKE AN ISRAELI OVERACTION, WHICH COULD FURTHER ALIENATE ISRAEL FROM THE U.S. AT THIS DELICATE MOMENT.

6. COMMENT: GENERAL GUR HAS BEEN MUCH IN THE NEWS IN RECENT DAYS AS THE COMMANDER OF THE PARATROOPS WHO TOOK EAST JERUSALEM TEN YEARS AGO. HIS MOOD, HOWEVER, WHEN SENATOR STONE AND I TALKED TO HIM WAS DISTINCTLY NOT ONE OF JUBILATION - QUITE THE REVERSE. THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE OF INDICATIONS IN RECENT MONTHS OF VARIOUS MOVES, PARTICULARLY ON THE EGYPTIAN SIDE, WHICH HAVE CAUSED THE ISRAELIS CONCERN. NONE OF THESE PARTICULAR EVENTS HAVE BEEN IN THEMSELVES ENOUGH FOR A CASUS BELLUM, BUT TAKEN TOGETHER THEY SEEM TO THE ISRAELIS TO BE PROOF THAT THE EGYPTIANS HAVE BY NO MEANS FORECLOSED THE WAR OPTION.

7. THE SENATOR AND I WERE BOTH IMPRESSED BY THE CALM TENOR OF GENERAL GUR'S COMMENTS AS HE EXPRESSED HIS CONCERNS TO US. IT WAS ALMOST AS THOUGH HE WAS SEEKING TO CONVINCE HIMSELF AS MUCH AS US. THOUGH LOGIC IS WHOLLY ON THE OTHER SIDE, NEITHER THE ISRAELIS NOR WE SECRET

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CAN PRUDENTLY EXCLUDE THE POSSIBILITY OF A LIMITED
MILITARY SURPRISE DESIGNED FOR POLITICAL PURPOSES.* *M***

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